

Deer Proofing Your Garden

As we have taken over more of the natural habitat and removed their natural predators, deer have proven just how adaptable they are. While we can spend a lot of time trying to keep the deer away from our plantings, we have to accept, that sometimes the best we will be able to do is encourage them to look elsewhere. There are various ways to limit the damage deer can cause in your yard, such as using scare tactics, powerful scents and spicy sprays. Most of these steps will work only briefly because deer learn to adapt rather quickly. It's best to keep them off balance by rotating tactics regularly.

Remember, if they're hungry enough, deer will stop at practically nothing to get food.

Fencing is the only foolproof option, yet here are a few ideas you might want to try.

Scare tactics

As prey, deer are always looking to avoid trouble, so new, unusual or startling situations often send them scurrying. Though suburban deer aren't as shy as their rural relations; they've gotten used to man's presence and are therefore more brazen. Also deer are creatures of habit. Observe their movement patterns, where they browse most frequently etc. and plan your scare tactics accordingly.

Sound – Some people suggest leaving a radio on in the yard. Less obtrusive are high-pitched warning devices activated by battery-operated motion detectors. An ultrasonic unit emits a sound only animals can hear. These devices can detect animals 50 ft away and cover an area of 4000 square feet.

Sprinklers and floodlights – Motion detectors can also be hooked up to sprinklers and floodlights. Deer will flee from a sudden glare of a floodlight or the jet spray of a sprinkler ('The Scarecrow' is one such product). Change the location frequently so they won't get used to it.

Fishing line – Some folks recommend stringing a strand of heavy fishing line around the parameter of the garden at a height of 3 feet. In theory, deer bump into this invisible barrier and retreat to safer ground. Mark the line with strips of cloth, though, so you don't trip over it.

Scent and taste

With scent, you can either confuse a deer with highly fragrant plants and materials (they'll be uncomfortable being unable to sniff the wind for danger) or you can spook them with the calling card of a predator.

Predator urine – If deer get a whiff of a predator (coyote, bobcat, cougar, bear or wolf urine) they'll probably avoid the area. You'll have to "freshen" up the scent regularly, especially after rain.

Strong aromas – Here are a couple of ideas for confusing deer rather than scaring them. First, you can hang *fabric softener strips* or cheesecloth bags of *mothballs* around the yard. Or take small *bars of soap*, drill a hole through each and tie the bars to woody plants. Space them 3 feet apart and leave the wrappers on for longevity. Soaps with a tallow base work best. *Human hair* can be an effective deterrent against wild deer, though more urbanized deer aren't put off by this. Finally, you can plant *garlic bulbs* around the perimeter of your garden or hang clip-on capsules of ultrapotent garlic oil wherever needed. Capsules last 6-8 months.

Unfavored flavors – Landscaping based on a knowledge of deer feeding habits can reduce or eliminate costly browsing damage to ornamentals. A few strategies to consider include planting susceptible plants close to the house or in a fenced yard, or planting preferred species inside a protective ring of less-preferred species. Try growing plants that are naturally repulsive to deer. In general, deer avoid eating coarse, fussy or spiny plants or those with strong aromas, especially lemony and minty ones. Again, if they're hungry enough, deer will eat just about anything. And plants that are ignored in one region may be eaten in another.

Nasty nibbles – There are two basic types of substances that are sprayed on plants: those that make the plants smell bad and those that taste bad. Deer don't go for spicy foods, so give them a taste to remember with a hot pepper spray. *Mix 2 Tbsp of hot pepper sauce with 1 Tbsp of liquid dish soap, 1 tsp of garlic powder & 1 gallon of water.* Spray on plants weekly or after it rains. Another homemade spray recipe: *3 eggs whipped up with 2 Tbsp of cayenne pepper and 1 gallon of water (1-4 cloves of garlic can be added as well).* Being herbivores, deer will turn their noses up to the eggs. And if they do take a bite of a treated plant, they'll regret the taste of the cayenne pepper.

Several commercial sprays are also available:

Deer Away – Made of putrescence egg solids. Repels by smell and taste and needs to be reapplied regularly. It rates consistently high in effectiveness studies.

Deer Off – The biodegradable, all-natural food product gives plants a bad taste and smell, but will not harm humans, pets or animals. Can be used on all food crops. One spray application can last up to 3 months, even through rain or snow, without leaving a residue on your plants.

Hinder – A combination of totally organic fatty acid soaps. Safe to spray around fruits and vegetables, as well as ornamental plants, it coats foliage and makes it bitter and unappealing to deer.

Tree Guard – A latex-based spray that sticks to the plants for weeks (maybe months). It repels by taste. The active ingredient (Bitrex) is a horrible tasting chemical that won't hurt the deer.

Repellex System – This is a two-part system (tablets and spray) for making plants taste bitter to deer. Place tablets into the soil at planting time or into root contact on more mature plants. In about a month, the plant tastes bitter to pests. Tablets are also a 14-2-2 fertilizer. They usually last for one full growing season; for evergreens and slower growing ornamentals they will last longer. For immediate protection spray the liquid Repellex on the plants, making them smell and taste bad. One application lasts about 3 months.

Plantskydd – A dried blood meal spray works by emitting an odor that deer associate with predators, repelling the animal before it nibbles on plants. The odor is not unpleasant to the applicator. Very popular with nurseries, landscapers and forest companies. Provides plants with up to 6 months of protection over winter on ornamental shrubs and 3 months on most other broadleaf plants.

Liquid Fence – Many gardeners have pretty good success with this product. Its active ingredients are rotten eggs and garlic oil. It should be applied monthly and is designed to withstand 1" of rain per week over a 3-4 week period.

Bobbex – A foliar spray that feeds plants with a beef and fish byproduct 14-1-1 fertilizer while repelling deer. Actively growing plants need to be sprayed every 2-3 weeks and after rain. Also try fish emulsion.

Milorganite is an organic fertilizer made from Milwaukee's wastewater treatment process. It repels by smell.

Many sprays are long-lasting, even after rain, but new growth won't be protected unless you treat regularly. The key to success with repellents is to start spraying them before deer begin browsing and to change repellents frequently, which keeps the deer from getting used to one taste and scent.

Fencing

If you don't want to spray, you can wrap plants in burlap in winter or drape them year round in a black, loose-mesh netting that's practically invisible from a distance. Also remember to protect your newly planted trees with metal cages or use tree guards (a plastic spiral wrap) around the trunk. Bucks rub their antlers on trees and shrubs to shed the velvet (starting in September).

Fencing is the most effective way to deter deer, though it doesn't always fit in with the aesthetics of our landscape or our budgets. Here are a few options:

Upright – A deer-proof fence should be at least 7-8 feet tall, solidly constructed and fit snugly to the ground. Wooden or chainlink fences can look imposing, but are nevertheless the best and most durable choice in the long run. A less expensive alternative is a black polypropylene fence, which is barely visible from a distance. Attach it to posts and pin the bottom to the ground with stakes every 12 feet so deer won't crawl under it.

Slanted – Another possibility is to construct a slanted fence facing outward (looks like a slanted A-frame). In this case, you can get away with using a shorter, 5 feet tall fence because the three dimensional effect confuses a deer's depth of vision and keeps it from jumping.

Double – Two shorter fences (4-5 ft tall), spaced 5 feet apart, are another alternative. What happens is that the deer won't want to jump the first fence if there's no clear place for them to land. While side-by-side fences may look odd, you can substitute a hedge for the inner fence because it also takes away a deer's landing spot.

Electrified – Shock deer, and they're not likely to return anytime soon. One way to do it is to run an electrified wire 30 inches off the ground, marking it with strips every 10 feet so deer can see it. Then bait the wire with peanut butter. Deer will give it a lick and learn a lesson.

Wireless Deer Fence – Each unit has a scent reservoir with perfumed oil that is attractive to deer. When deer investigate, they receive a small electric shock. The deer learn to avoid them, so you'll need to keep moving the posts. They are powered by two AA batteries.

For more information on how to deer proof your garden, search the internet or ask for help at your County Extension office. Following books contain valuable information: "Deer Proofing your yard & garden" by Rhonda Massingham Hart, and "Outwitting Deer" by Bill Adler Jr.

Deer Resistant Plants

Please note: This list of deer-resistant plants was compiled from a variety of sources including my own experience. Some plants may be ignored by deer in one region and eaten by deer in another. And if deer are hungry enough, or there's a limited amount of food available, they will eat practically anything. In general, deer avoid eating plants with coarse, fuzzy and silvery leaves and strong scents. This would include most of the herbs. Plants marked with * are rarely ever damaged.

Perennials

Achillea – Yarrow
Aconitum – Monkshood *
Agastache – Anise Hyssop
Ajuga spp. – Bugleweed *
Alchemilla – Lady's Mantle
Allium senescens – Ornamental Onion *
Amsonia – Blue Star
Anemone spp. – Anemone
Aquilegia – Columbine
Arabis spp. – Rock Cress
Anthemis – Hardy Marguerite
Artemisia spp. – Wormwood, White Sage *
Aruncus – Goatsbeard *
Asarum canadense – Wild Ginger *
Asclepias spp. – Butterfly Weed, Milkweed *
Astilbe – False Spirea *
Baptisia – False Indigo
Brunnera – False Forget-Me-Not, Siberian Bugloss
Campanula spp. – Bellflower
Centaurea spp. – Cornflower, Knapweed
Cerastium tomentosum – Snow-in-Summer *
Chrysanthemum spp. – Shasta Daisy, Mums
Cimicifuga – Snakeroot, Bugbane *
Clematis – Clematis
Convallaria majalis – Lily-of-the-Valley *
Coreopsis spp. – Tickseed
Crococsmia – Montbretia
Delphinium spp. – Delphinium, Larkspur
Dicentra spp. – Bleeding Heart *
Dictamnus – Gas Plant *
Digitalis spp. – Foxglove *
Echinacea spp. – Cone Flower
Echinops ritro – Globe Thistle *
Epimedium spp. – Barrenwort
Eryngium – Sea Holly *
Eupatorium spp. – Joe Pye Weed
Euphorbia spp. – Spurge *
Ferns – all varieties *
Filipendula rubra – Queen-of-the-Prairie
Gaillardia – Blanket Flower
Galium – Sweet Woodruff *
Geranium spp. – Cranesbill
Geum coccineum – Avens
Grasses – most Ornamental Grasses & Sedges *
Gypsophila – Baby's Breath
Helleborus – Lenten Rose *
Hibiscus – Rose Mallow
Iris spp. – Iris, Siberian, Bearded etc. *
Lamium – Dead Nettle *

Lavandula spp. – Lavender *
Liatris – Blazing Star, Gay Feather *
Ligularia spp. – Golden Ray *
Lobelia – Cardinal Flower
Lupinus – Lupines *
Lychnis coronaria – Rose Campion *
Lysimachia – Creeping Jenny
Mertensia virginica – Virginia Bluebells *
Monarda spp. – Bee Balm *
Myosotis – Forget-me-Not
Nepeta spp. – Catmint *
Oenothera spp. – Evening Primrose, Sundrops
Paeonia – Peony *
Papaver orientalis – Oriental Poppy *
Perovskia – Russian Sage *
Phlox subulata – Creeping Phlox *
Physostegia – Obedient Plant
Platycodon – Balloon Flower *
Polemonium – Jacob's Ladder
Polygonatum spp. – Solomon's Seal
Primula spp. – Primrose
Pulmonaria spp. – Lungwort *
Pulsatilla vulgaris – Pasque Flower
Rodgersia – Rodger's Flower *
Rudbeckia – Black Eyed Susan
Salvia spp. – Meadow Sage *
Sagina subulata – Irish & Scotch Moss *
Scabiosa – Pincushion Flower
Sempervivum – Hen & Chicks *
Silphium perfoliatum – Cup Plant
Solidago spp. – Goldenrod *
Stachys spp. – Lamb's Ear, Betony *
Tanacetum spp. – Feverfew, Tansy *
Thalictrum spp. – Meadow Rue
Thymus spp. – Creeping Thyme *
Tiarella – Foamflower
Verbascum – Mullein *
Veronica spp. – Speedwell
Vinca minor – Periwinkle, Myrtle *
Viola spp. – Violet
Yucca – Adam's Needle *

Bulbs

Allium spp. – Ornamental Onions *
Fritillaria spp. – Checkered Flower *
Hyacinthus orientalis – Hyacinth *
Leucojum spp. – Snowflake *
Muscari spp. – Grape Hyacinth *
Narcissus spp. – Daffodils *
Scilla siberica – Siberian Squill *

Annuals

Ageratum – *Floss Flower* *
Angelonia angustifolia – *Angelonia* *
Antirrhinum – *Snapdragon*
Begonia – *Wax Begonia*
Calendula – *Pot Marigold* *
Capsicum annuum – *Ornamental Pepper* *
Cleome – *Spider Flower* *
Cosmos – *Cosmos*
Cynoglossum – *Chinese Forget-me-not*
Dahlia – *Dahlia*
Gomphrena – *Globe Amaranth*
Helichrysum spp. – *Strawflower, Licorice Plants* *
Heliotropium – *Heliotrope* *
Hypoestes – *Polkadot Plant*
Ipomea – *Morning Glory, Moonflower*
Lantana – *Lantana* *
Lobelia erinus – *Lobelia*
Lobularia – *Sweet Alyssum*
Mirabilis – *Four O’Clock* *
Mimulus – *Monkey Flower*
Nierembergia – *Cupflower*
Nicotiana – *Flowering Tobacco*
Pelargonium spp. – *Scented Geranium* *
Ricinus communis – *Castor Bean* *
Salpiglossis – *Painted Tongue*
Salvia spp. – *Salvia*
Senecio cineraria – *Dusty Miller* *
Tagetes – *Marigolds* *
Tithonia – *Mexican Sunflower*
Tropaeolum – *Nasturtium* *
Verbena – *Verbena*
Zantedeschia – *Calla Lily* *
Zinnia - *Zinnias*

Trees

Aesculus glabra – *Ohio Buckeye*
Amelanchier spp. - *Serviceberry*
Betula nigra – *River Birch*
Betula papyrifera – *Paper Birch*
Carpinus caroliniana – *Blue Beech, Ironwood*
Crataegus spp. – *Hawthorn* *
Elaeagnus angustifolia – *Russian Olive* *
Gleditsia spp. - *Honeylocust*
Juniperus scopulorum – *Rocky Mountain Juniper* *
Juniperus virginiana – *Eastern Redcedar* *
Larix spp. – *Larch* *
Magnolia spp. - *Magnolia*
Ostrya virginiana – *American Hophornbeam, Ironwood*
Picea spp. – *All Spruce (Colorado Blue, Norway etc.)* *
Pinus spp. – *Red Pine, Scotch Pine* *

Shrubs

Berberis spp. – *Barberry* *
Buddleia – *Butterfly Bush*
Buxus microphylla – *Boxwood* *
Cornus sericea – *Red Osier Dogwood*
Cotinus spp. - *Smokebush*
Cotoneaster spp. - *Cotoneaster*
Daphne x burkwoodii – *Daphne* *
Diervilla – *Bush Honeysuckle* *
Forsythia spp. – *Forsythia* *
Hamamelis virginiana – *Witch Hazel*
Juniperus spp. – *Juniper* *
Microbiota decussate – *Russian Cypress*
Potentilla fruticosa – *Potentilla* *
Spirea spp. – *Japanese Spirea, Bridal Wreath Sp.* *
Sambucus spp. – *Elderberry* *
Syringa spp. – *Lilac (might eat flowerbuds)*

Vines

Campsis radicans - *Trumpetvine*
Celastrus scandens – *American Bittersweet* *
Clematis - *Clematis*
Lonicera spp. – *Climbing Honeysuckle*
Parthenocissus spp. – *Woodbine, Engelman Ivy* *
Wisteria macrostachya – *Wisteria* *



“Surround Yourself With Beauty”

Clear Creek Nursery – N7855 State Rd. 40 – Bruce, WI 54819 – (715) 868-6081

www.clearcreeknursery.com